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Summary record of the 2598th meeting
Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Tuesday, 28 November 2017, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Crickley

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Consideration of reports, comments and information submitted by States parties under article 9 of the Convention (*continued*)

Combined eleventh and twelfth reports of Slovakia (CERD/C/SVK/11-12, CERD/C/SVK/Q/11-12)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Slovakia took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Podhorský** (Slovakia), introducing his country's combined eleventh and twelfth periodic reports (CERD/C/SVK/11-12), said that the main instrument for eliminating racial discrimination in Slovakia was the National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights, which had been approved in 2015. In order to meet the Strategy's objectives, three action plans had been adopted, respectively on the prevention of all forms of discrimination; on the prevention and elimination of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance; and on the rights of national minorities and ethnic groups.

3. The action plan on the prevention and elimination of racism was complemented by the Concept for Combating Extremism for the period from 2015 to 2019, which served as a comprehensive programme defining strategic priorities for the prevention and elimination of radicalization and extremism and of threats to fundamental rights and freedoms, democracy and the rule of law. The security of the countries of the European Union, including Slovakia, had been directly affected by the rise of radicalization in other countries, reflected in internal conflicts and the formation of armed groups with extremist ideologies, with the involvement of citizens of the European Union. It was thus necessary to focus on the prevention of radicalization and the elimination of its causes. The Ministry of Justice had allocated some €760,000 per year for the promotion and protection of human rights, including €220,000 for the prevention of extremism and radicalization.

4. Every two years, the Ministry of Justice presented the Government with a report on the implementation of the National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights. It also continuously informed the Government's Council for Human Rights, National Minorities, and Gender Equality of the progress made. While many of the objectives of the National Strategy had already been achieved, ensuring human rights education and legal literacy remained a challenge. A forthcoming reform of the education system would address that issue.

5. In 2015, the Council for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality had been transferred from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ministry of Justice, and since then it had been chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Justice, whose Ministry had also taken on new competencies for the drawing up of State policy in respect of human rights. The Council, on which the Government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were represented equally, met four times a year and provided a space for open dialogue between State bodies and civil society; it also issued proposals and recommendations. It had seven committees, which addressed issues relating to the prevention and elimination of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance; national minorities and ethnic groups; the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons; human rights research and education; the rights of persons with disabilities; gender equality; and the rights of children and youth.

6. The Criminal Code had been amended to more effectively address extremism and racially motivated crimes, inter alia by introducing definitions of such crimes, by considering racially motivated acts as acts of extremism, by extending the definition of incitement to hatred and by broadening the definition of extremist material. It was no longer necessary to prove that defendants created, disseminated or possessed such material to prove their intention to incite hatred or violence. In the past, the support and promotion of political movements aimed at suppressing fundamental rights and freedoms had already been criminal offences; with the amendment, the establishment of such movements too was considered a criminal act. The amendment had also introduced provisions to bring the law into line with the Convention and with the International Convention on the Suppression and

Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid, with a view to prohibiting any discrimination that would violate the relevant provision of the country's Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms.

7. Jurisdiction over crimes of extremism had been assigned exclusively to a specialized criminal court, and the Ministry of Justice had reinforced its department dealing with extremism and had established a new expert unit with two sections, devoted to dealing with political extremism and religious extremism, respectively. Since February 2017, specialized police had been assigned to a unit to combat terrorism and extremism set up under the National Criminal Agency. Slovak officials took part in specific training programmes under the Training against Hate Crimes for Law Enforcement (TAHCLE) programme and the Prosecutors and Hate Crime Training programme of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

8. A new law on victims of crimes would enter into force in 2018 and provide special protection and services for victims of hate crimes. It also introduced new concepts into national legislation, including a definition of the word "victim", the right of protection against secondary and repeated victimization and a definition of domestic violence.

9. The National Strategy for Roma Inclusion by 2020 included action plans for education, employment, health, housing, financial inclusion, non-discrimination and integration. The Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities had submitted proposals for the implementation of the Strategy. The proposals called for inclusive education, in particular at primary level; more effective provision of subsidies to meet social and cultural needs and better coverage by community centres; and efforts to improve financial literacy and employment services in marginalized Roma communities.

10. The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, within the framework of its investment priorities and operational programmes, supported projects to combat racism and discrimination and assist in the integration of marginalized Roma communities, including two national projects, one of which was aimed at ensuring the sustainable integration of young people endangered by social exclusion, while the ultimate objective of the second project was to increase participation by members of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in the labour market; the project had already benefited more than 23,000 persons.

11. The aims of the State Housing Policy Concept for 2020 were to provide for new public rental housing and to encourage the renovation of the existing housing stock. The Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development provided subsidies to municipalities to encourage construction of public rental housing, with grants of up to 80 per cent of acquisition or construction costs, specifically tailored to meet the housing needs of vulnerable groups, including members of the Roma community. Future tenants were able to shoulder part of the remaining portion of the costs by providing their own labour. New measures had been adopted to facilitate the settlement of ownership claims made by members of the Roma community who considered that they owned their current dwellings.

12. An action plan for health was aimed at reducing disparities between members of the Roma community and the majority population by promoting healthy lifestyles, preventing diseases and improving living conditions. A national project was being implemented under the title "Healthy Communities" with the aim of implementing the recommendations of the Council of Europe on effective measures for the integration of Roma in the Council's member States. The project was one of the most developed of its kind in Central Europe and featured proven and internationally acclaimed health education programmes, with trained teams of field workers. Nearly 1,000 general practitioners, paediatricians and health-care assistants worked on the project, and some 66,000 persons had benefited from its activities in 2016. About €13 million in funding for 2017–2019 would be provided through the European Structural and Investment Funds. Sustaining the project would be crucial to ensuring the protection of the right to health for members of Roma communities.

13. The recommendations made by the Committee in respect of de facto segregation in the education system had been taken very seriously. Changes had already been made in the law so that pupils whose special education needs arose solely from their development in a socially disadvantaged environment could not be admitted to special classes or special elementary schools and instead were included in common classes with other students. In

addition, the financial contribution for such pupils had been increased significantly. The Committee had also recommended that the Schools Act and the Anti-Discrimination Act should be effectively enforced. The State School Inspectorate had for years identified cases of segregation in schools and had taken remedial measures in response. Its reports were public, which meant that it had a gradual impact on the behaviour not only of the schools it identified, but other schools as well. The Inspectorate had found traces of segregation in three schools in the 2016/17 school year. The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport had held a peer learning activity in Slovakia in cooperation with the European Commission on the identification of challenges and methods of prevention of discrimination and segregation in education, with participants from a number of European Union member States. Within Slovakia, the School Open to All project had been implemented in the framework of the operational plan for human resources. The project covered the provision of inclusive education at 150 schools and also prepared local desegregation plans.

14. The success of inclusive education depended largely on support services and the adequacy of material and technical backup. The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport had thus drawn up a model for optimizing the number of professional staff at schools, including psychologists, special education teachers, social instructors and teaching assistants. The model took into account the need to provide effective education covering special needs without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunities, in an inclusive education system. There was awareness of the need to avoid wrong placement in special primary schools based on misdiagnosis of mental disability. The overall goal was to integrate vulnerable groups of children, including children from socially disadvantaged environments, into the mainstream education system. The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport had launched a pilot project for the least developed areas around the town of Kežmarok to create a model for the diagnosis and re-diagnosis of children, with pedagogical and psychological support.

15. Slovakia had joined an initiative of the European Commission and the Council of Europe entitled INSCHOOL Inclusive schools: Making a difference for Roma children. It also took part in the internationally acclaimed Teach for All programme, which addressed educational issues affecting socially disadvantaged communities. The Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities and the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport had drawn up a methodology for the informed consent of parents whose children were enrolled in special schools, and the methodology was implemented in consultation with the public defender of rights and the State School Inspectorate.

16. By law, children of foreigners were enrolled in the education system under the same conditions as citizens. Teachers were accredited under a specific programme for the teaching of Slovak as a foreign language. Adult migrants were provided with intensive language courses. In 2016 the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport had established a new department for the education of national minorities; it had drawn up and implemented a pilot project for bilingual digital educational content for kindergartens and pre-primary schools, under which such children received instruction in their mother tongue by means of interactive links to resources in the Hungarian, Roma and Ruthenian languages. Services were also provided in Russian, Ukrainian and German.

17. A grant programme was being implemented to ensure the preservation, protection and development of the identity and cultural values of national minorities and to foster inter-ethnic and intercultural dialogue and understanding between ethnic minorities and the national majority.

18. In 2017, the Government had set up a fund to protect and promote the cultural identity of national minorities through the provision of subsidies and scholarships. The fund was managed by representatives of all national minorities and would have an annual budget of around €8 million.

19. The funds available under the grant programme on access to culture for disadvantaged groups had risen from €375,300 in 2016 to €980,000 in 2017. The target groups covered by the programme included Roma communities and migrants.

20. In addition to the network of museums focusing on the history and culture of national minorities, the first Holocaust museum dedicated solely to the remembrance of Slovak Jews had been opened in 2016, on the site of the former concentration camp in Sereď.

21. A number of measures had been taken to promote the use of national minority languages. Bilingual public administration dictionaries, in minority languages such as Hungarian and Romani, had been compiled and published on the website of the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for National Minorities. The use of Romani in Slovakia had been mapped, with a view to establishing Romani-language schools.

22. A progress report on the implementation of the international and national legal frameworks for the protection of minority languages was submitted every two years, allowing shortcomings at the local and national levels to be identified and addressed. A newly established department of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport was taking steps to promote education in national minority languages.

23. A new policy for the integration of migrants, covering issues such as housing, education and employment, had been introduced in January 2014; the policy aimed to raise public awareness of the situation of migrants in order to protect them from racism and exclusion.

24. With respect to the ongoing refugee crisis, his Government believed that member States of the European Union should be allowed to determine the nature and quantity of assistance that they would provide. In that context, it had deployed police officers and experts to support the work of the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (FRONTEX) and the European Asylum Support Office (EASO).

25. In connection with the mass inflow of refugees into Austria in the summer of 2015, accommodation and meals had been provided for 1,228 asylum seekers at a facility in the city of Gabčíkovo, under a memorandum of understanding with the Government of Austria.

26. The Migration Office of the Ministry of the Interior had produced a practical guide for asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection in Slovakia; the guide was available in several languages and contained information on topics such as health care and employment.

27. Since January 2012, a total of 846 refugees had been housed temporarily in Slovakia pending their permanent resettlement, under agreements signed with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Steps were being taken to conclude a new agreement to replace the current one, which would expire on 31 December 2017.

28. **Mr. Cali Tzay** (Country Rapporteur), commending the State party on the size and diversity of its delegation, said that he welcomed the amendments that had been made to various pieces of legislation in order to combat racism and establish a definition of racial discrimination that was consistent with article 1 of the Convention. He would appreciate information on cases of racial discrimination in which the provisions of the Convention had been invoked before a domestic court.

29. The Committee was concerned by reports that proceedings were being brought against six Roma who had filed complaints of police violence, in an apparent attempt to discourage other Roma victims from reporting abuse. The lack of disaggregated data provided by the State party made it difficult to assess how much progress had been made in eliminating discrimination against Roma. Furthermore, the statistics on Roma supplied by the State party differed from those published by other bodies: the Government had stated that Roma accounted for 2.45 per cent of the population, for example, whereas the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) had reported that they accounted for 6 to 8 per cent of the population.

30. The national human rights institution, which was not accredited under the Paris Principles, also served as the national anti-discrimination body and needed more technical, financial and human resources in order to perform both roles effectively. The Committee

welcomed reports that the mandate and independence of the institution were being strengthened and hoped to see a representative of the institution at its next dialogue with the State party.

31. It appeared that the position at the head of the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for National Minorities had been vacant for some time; concerns had also been raised about the decision to bring that Office under the aegis of the Ministry of the Interior.

32. He would appreciate more detailed information on temporary special measures adopted to promote the economic, cultural and social rights of Roma; the practical implementation and outcomes of the National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and the National Strategy for Roma Inclusion in Slovakia by 2020; and the steps taken to enforce the Anti-Discrimination Act.

33. In the light of concerns that racist discourse against Roma was disseminated by the media and by politicians seeking to win votes, he wished to know whether acts of incitement to racial hatred were investigated and punished. The State party should amend its Criminal Code to establish racist discourse as a criminal offence and ensure that offences of that kind were prosecuted. Although measures had been taken to prevent the establishment of extremist groups, it remained unclear whether participation in such groups was considered a criminal offence.

34. Noting that ill-treatment of Roma by the police persisted, despite the Government's efforts, he asked whether the allegations of police violence during raids on Roma settlements in Vrbnica and Zborov had been investigated and if so, what the outcome of those investigations had been.

35. Suspected ill-treatment by police required ex officio investigation, yet the State party had no independent mechanism for the investigation of offences allegedly involving police officers, as had also been noted recently by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights.

36. In 2009 10 police officers had been investigated for beating Roma detainees, including several minors aged 11 to 17, after having forced them to strip and kiss each other, while in police custody. The officers had also filmed the incident on their mobile phones. Ultimately charges had been brought against only three of the officers, and they had been acquitted on appeal in May 2017 on the grounds that the videos were illegal and therefore could not be admitted in evidence. Meanwhile, in 2015, a Ministry of the Interior investigation had found that no offence had been committed, based on a report that had amounted to an exercise in racial profiling and stereotyping, discrediting the evidence of the Roma complainants by calling in question their personal characteristics and their cultural values and background.

37. The case brought to mind the methods used in the early 2000s by Slovakian police, who had used threats to deter Roma women from proceeding with complaints of forced sterilization. Such responses on the part of the police sent a message to the Roma community that there was no redress against racially motivated abuse.

38. Other features of the situation of the Roma included a lack of access to adequate housing and to education. Discrimination against Roma children in schools was prevalent: they were segregated in special classrooms or placed in classes for children with disabilities and the dropout rate was high. Women seeking health care were subjected to ill-treatment and humiliation.

The meeting was suspended at 4.35 p.m. and resumed at 4.55 p.m.

39. **Mr. Kut** (Special Rapporteur for follow-up on concluding observations) said that, in its previous concluding observations (CERD/C/SVK/CO/9-10, para. 22), the Committee had asked the State party to provide information within one year on its follow-up to certain of the recommendations made. The State party had submitted a follow-up report in timely fashion, for which the Committee was grateful, and in its periodic report had provided further information on each of the issues addressed.

40. On the question of prosecution of racially motivated violence and crimes, the State party had described the current situation in paragraphs 124 to 127 of its periodic report, but the Committee would appreciate more information on action taken and the outcome of such action. The statistics given in the annex to the report were useful insofar as they showed that the police and the judiciary were keeping crime statistics, but they also showed that only three people had been prosecuted.

41. On racist discourse in the media, paragraphs 132 to 137 of the report described the State party's strategy for combating extremism. Again, the Committee would welcome information on the impact of the strategy. The issue of continued de facto segregation in the education system was dealt with in paragraphs 146 to 168 of the report, which described the State party's extensive efforts to address the problem. The Committee would like to know what had improved as a result of those efforts.

42. As to the State party's responsibility for implementation of the Convention, relating among other things to the decisions of municipalities to finance the construction of walls to separate Roma settlements from the rest of the population, he noted that paragraphs 200 to 203 of the periodic report described the State party's legal framework but the Committee could not accept that a State's internal administrative divisions could permit the Government to turn a blind eye to such initiatives. He would welcome an update on any developments or improvements in the situation on the ground.

43. **Mr. Kemal** said that, according to the first-hand accounts in the latest report on Slovakia by the Centre for Reproductive Rights, discrimination against Roma women in access to health was widespread. They experienced segregation in maternity wards, which resulted in inferior quality of care and their newborn babies were taken away from them. They were subjected to disrespect and abuse and were often the last to be attended to even if other non-Roma patients arrived after them. They were blamed for having large numbers of children, although costly contraceptives were not covered by health insurance and so were unaffordable. They were sometimes forced to share beds. Noting that some improvements had been reported, he said that more needed to be done and asked the State party to look into the problem.

44. **Mr. Avtonomov** said that the Committee welcomed the State party's efforts to combat human trafficking and to provide assistance and support to the victims of trafficking. At the same time, he noted that the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, in its latest concluding observations (CEDAW/C/SVK/CO/5-6, para. 22), had expressed concern at the greater vulnerability of Roma women and girls to trafficking, including internal trafficking, for the purposes of sexual exploitation. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination therefore wished to ask the Government to further increase its efforts to protect Roma girls in particular from trafficking, including through the State party's national programme to combat human trafficking and the strategy for the protection of children against violence. The Committee would appreciate information on any specific measures adopted by the State party in that regard and their results.

45. Noting the measures implemented by the Government in respect of integration of Roma communities and of Roma children and youth, he said that the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its latest concluding observations (CRC/C/SVK/CO/3-5, para. 44), had expressed concern that Roma children were subject to de facto segregation in the education system and that attendance rates were low and dropout rates high. In the view of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, it was important for the Government to redouble its efforts, including by effective implementation of the Strategy for Roma Integration by 2020, with the aim of facilitating access to education for Roma children and protecting them from exposure to the worst forms of child labour. He would be grateful for any information the delegation could provide on the results achieved, in particular with regard to school attendance rates.

46. Although the Committee welcomed the official recognition of the Ruthenian minority and its language and the creation of an environment conducive to its further development, it wished to know why official statistics indicated that the Ruthenian population, formerly estimated at about 30,000 people, had declined to just 15,100 as of 2014.

47. **Mr. Murillo Martínez**, referring to paragraph 128 of the State party's report, said that he welcomed the action taken under the Anti-Discrimination Act to strengthen implementation of the principle of the reversal of the burden of proof, which was a positive and effective mechanism for combating racism and racial discrimination and which might also help reduce the delays in the administration of justice; he requested statistics on cases in which that principle had been invoked. Similarly, he wondered whether it might be possible under the Anti-Discrimination Act to lift the restrictions on the processing of personal data revealing racial or ethnic origin in order to provide statistics on the perpetrators or victims of racial discrimination, which would help the Committee to understand how effectively the Convention was being implemented in Slovakia.

48. As in many European countries, racism and hate speech in football were a growing problem and increasingly appeared to be used as a political weapon. Noting with particular concern that the Japanese footballer Yuki Nakamura had been forced to leave his club and return to his country, he asked what specific measures were being taken to neutralize racism and racial discrimination in football.

49. Considering that minority groups' participation in decision-making in the public and private sectors was an indicator of their social inclusion, the Committee would appreciate information on the place occupied by Roma — who accounted for more than 7 per cent of the population — in State decision-making bodies and other public institutions. Recalling that in its communication No. 56/2014: *Ms. I.S. v. the Slovak Republic* (CERD/C/88/DR/56/2014), the Committee had adopted an opinion on a case of racial discrimination against a young woman who had applied for a teaching post in a public institution, he asked for information on the measures taken to implement the Committee's recommendation in that case.

50. **Ms. Dah**, welcoming the useful update provided by the head of delegation's opening remarks, said that the State party was to be congratulated on the timely submission of its report, its common core document (HRI/CORE/SVK/2014) and its follow-up report on the Committee's previous concluding observations (CERD/C/SVK/CO/9-10/Add.1). However, she believed that the State party needed to address a number of issues at the institutional level. During its last review in 2013, the State party had stated that the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights had lost its accreditation under the Paris Principles, and while the report indicated that it had since recovered its B status, it was to be hoped that it would gain A status by the time of the next review. More progress would be achieved in that regard, and in improving the performance and utilization of the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for National Minorities and the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities, if the State party were to address the lack of funds mentioned in the report.

51. Recognizing that Slovakia was participating in the European Union Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, she reiterated that the Committee would welcome fully disaggregated data on Roma, including in respect of their geographical location, housing and education; such information would also allow the Government to better combat segregation and discrimination in terms of access to employment and other economic, social and cultural rights. As regards the behaviour of professionals in the health and criminal justice sectors, she considered that the emphasis should be placed on the training of staff in order to raise their awareness of international human rights instruments. Lastly, in the light of past cases of forced sterilization of Roma women, she would be grateful if the State party would provide further information about its current reproductive health policy, since it appeared that birth control was not favoured and was extremely expensive in the country.

52. **Ms. Shepherd** said that in a recent newspaper article, Ibrahim Maiga, a pop music star and actor of African origin, had stated that while his fame had raised the profile of the black community in Slovakia, it had also shielded him from the racism that its members often experienced. According to the article, "for most of the African community in Slovakia […] racism is not an occasional nuisance but a constant struggle played out in almost every facet of life, from finding employment to being able to walk safely down the street". The article also included an interview with the director of an association of African families formed to combat racial violence, who had claimed that brutal attacks on his community

had reached an alarming level and that many cases went unreported. In view of those claims, she requested that information be provided on cases of racial discrimination against Africans and the steps that were being taken, if any, to prosecute hate crimes against Africans and to educate society in practising tolerance for diversity. Noting that Slovakia had withdrawn its opposition to the European migrant relocation mechanism, she asked how many Africans were among the migrants that the State party had received.

53. **Mr. Bossuyt** said that he would like to know whether the Roma minority accounted for 2 per cent or 7.45 per cent of the population, since paragraphs 8 and 118 of the report gave contradictory figures. He would appreciate information as to the nature and form of the temporary countervailing measures mentioned in paragraph 29, the basis on which such measures might be implemented and their outcomes. Noting that the term "extremism" frequently appeared in the report, including in relation to its possible incorporation into the Criminal Code, he asked whether the delegation could provide a satisfactory legal definition of that term, since he was concerned that it might become a label applied to those with different political opinions and would ultimately undermine freedom of speech. In that context, he was interested to know why the Government had incorporated "offences of extremism" into its domestic legislation as part of the transposition of the European Union Framework Decision on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law, when the Framework Decision made no mention of extremism.

54. He would be grateful for further information on the functions of the Constitutional Court, in addition to its efforts to monitor and ensure the smooth conduct of legal proceedings. The Committee would also appreciate some clarification of paragraph 147 of the report, concerning a draft amendment to the Education Act. While the wording of that paragraph was unclear, it seemed to suggest that the amendment would have an impact on minorities such as Roma.

55. **Mr. Khalaf** said that he was concerned about the legal protection of the Convention in the Slovak legal system. Although article 154 of the Constitution stated that international human rights treaties were part of the legal order and that they had intermediate value between constitutional and domestic laws, the State party had also suggested in its report that fundamental rights and freedoms could be restricted by law. Therefore, he wished to know whether and under what conditions such a restriction might be applied to the Convention.

56. Noting that article 127 of the Constitution stipulated that "the Constitutional Court shall decide on complaints of natural persons or legal persons if they are pleading the infringement of their fundamental rights or freedoms or human rights and fundamental freedoms resulting from the international treaty which has been ratified by the Slovak Republic and promulgated in the manner laid down by a law, save where another court shall decide on protection of these rights and freedoms," he asked that the delegation provide details on whether the Constitutional Court had indeed heard complaints submitted by victims of racial discrimination, and on the number, nature and outcomes of any such complaints. Moreover, he wondered whether any other special courts had been set up to decide on complaints and whether the State party considered that the proceedings mentioned under article 127 amounted to the exhaustion of domestic remedies.

57. While there was no doubt that Slovakia was a democratic country, he was concerned that an important democratic principle, namely that of the separation of powers, might be undermined by the fact that the President had the power to appoint and remove judges. Noting that the Judiciary Council — the senior authority responsible for proposing changes to the judiciary — was composed of 18 members designated by the executive branch, the legislature and the President, respectively, he asked whether that arrangement, too, was contrary to the principle of the separation of powers. How did the State party ensure the independence of its judiciary?

58. **Ms. Mohamed** said that she would like to know whether the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights was competent to conduct investigations into cases of racial discrimination, was informed of the outcomes of investigations conducted by other bodies, and provided assistance to victims. She asked whether the Government had taken steps,

including regulatory measures, to prevent hate speech in schools. Lastly, taking up the point raised by Ms. Dah about past cases of forced sterilization of Roma women, she asked whether an investigation had been conducted and the victims compensated.

59. **The Chair** said that the Committee members had asked numerous questions about the complex situation facing Roma and other minority groups. She looked forward to the deepening of the dialogue at the subsequent meeting, which she believed would enhance the Committee's understanding of the challenges facing Slovakia.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.